Brazilian Pepper

Schinus terebinthifolius

Order: Sapindales
Family: Anacardiaceae

Description: Known as the Florida holly, the Brazilian pepper is a shrub or small tree easily recognized by its dark green leaves and clusters of red berries. It is related to poison ivy and is toxic to some people. Brazilian pepper is an introduced species that can crowd out native plants, necessitating its removal in many areas.

Special Features:

- **Leaves** – Bright green and non-leathery in texture, the leaves are compound, meaning there are several leaflets arranged opposite each other around one stem. When crushed, the leaves smell like turpentine.
- **Size** – The Brazilian pepper is a multi-trunk shrub that can grow as tall as 40 feet and have a diameter of more than a foot.
- **Flowers and Fruits** – A female Brazilian pepper produces sprays of small yellowish-white flowers in Spring, and clusters of small red berries in early fall.
- **Allelopathy** (suppression of growth of one plant species by another due to the release of toxic substances) – The Brazilian pepper produces compounds that inhibit the growth of native vegetation.
- **Medical Uses** – Virtually all parts of the Brazilian pepper have been used medicinally throughout the tropics including its leaves, bark, fruit, seeds and resin. It may be used as a topical antiseptic, aid in treating anything from a tooth ache to depression, in addition to respiratory and urinary infections.

Similar Species: *Schinus molle* and *Schinus aroeira*

Range and habitat: Indigenous to South and Central America, the Brazilian pepper is found in semi-tropical and tropical parts of the United States. It can grow in wet or dry soil and is salt tolerant. In addition, it appears unaffected by flooding, fire and drought. Widely distributed in Florida, the

Brazilian pepper is sensitive to cold temperatures and therefore limited to protected areas in central Florida. It is an aggressive invader of disturbed habitats, and can successfully colonize several native plant communities including hammocks, pinelands and mangrove forests.

Reproduction: Each sex occurs on a separate plant. Male flowers last only 1 day. Female flowers last up to 6 days and are insect pollinated. Fruits are usually mature by December. Birds and mammals are the chief means of dispersal. Seedlings have a high rate of survival and some can be found all year. Reproduction can occur 3 years after germination. Some trees can live for about 35 years.

Notes:

- **History** – The Brazilian pepper has been found in ancient religious artifacts and idols, but was brought to Florida in the 1840s for use as an ornamental shrub.
- **Status** – What was once a favorite shrub now dominates 700,000 acres from North central to South Florida. It is on the state of Florida's prohibited plant list and is therefore illegal to cultivate, sell or transport.
- **Ecology** – The Brazilian pepper hurts the shoreline by disturbing natural fish breeding habitat. It crowds out valuable mangroves, and its shallow roots allow erosion. Brazilian pepper destroys valuable wildlife habitats in freshwater wetlands and upland pine forests, and it produces many seeds that can sprout years later.
- **Growth** – Winter flocks of birds love the berries, and they are credited with helping to spread Brazilian pepper. It resprouts when burned or cut, and must be killed with herbicides.